

VZCZCXRO3898

PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #1607/01 1701052
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 191052Z JUN 09
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3540
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001607

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/18/2019

TAGS: PREF PGOV PREL PHUM I2

SUBJECT: MODM PROMISES MORE FUNDS AND SUPPORT FOR IDPS AND
RETURNEES

REF: BAGHDAD 1558

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Robert S. Ford for reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MODM) plans to expand its displaced and returnee assistance programs. MODM Director General of Humanitarian Affairs, Samir al Nahi, claims that the Prime Minister's Office has promised to supplement the Ministry's humanitarian assistance budget with an additional 141 billion Iraqi dinar or \$120.5 million (1 USD = 1,170 Iraqi Dinar). To streamline the processing of returnees, as of June, the MODM no longer requires returnees to register with local authorities before registering with the Ministry's Return Assistance Centers (RAC), thereby reducing average processing times by two thirds. MODM just concluded a two month program that allowed unregistered IDPs who wished to return to their original neighborhoods to register as returnees and receive government stipends. MODM intends to conduct an Iraq wide survey of the nation's displaced to determine their needs and intent to return. Finally, MODM plans to provide stipends to those IDPs who do not wish to return home, but would rather stay where they are. The drop in returns during May appears to be cyclical and early indicators show returns rebounding in June. End summary.

¶2. (C) On June 18, IDP and Refugee Affairs Office (REF) and the USAID - Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) met the Karkh (West Baghdad) Returns Assistance Center's (RAC) new director, Sadek Abu Nayela and MODM DG for Humanitarian Affairs, Samir al Nahi. RAC Director Sadek Abu Nayela explained recent procedural changes intended to streamline the returns process. On May 20, MODM drafted an internal memo agreeing to drop its previous requirement that families wishing to change their status from displaced to returnees both de-register as IDPs and also provide evidence that they have informed local councils and security forces of their intent to return. MODM found it unnecessary to provide documentation from local authorities since the Ministry had already verified families' origins during the IDP registration process. Sadek said that eliminating this extra step cut the average return processing time from 30 days to ten.

¶3. (SBU) UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Returns Survey reports a significant decrease in the number of returns during April and May - 2,990 families in May, down 38 percent from this year's high in March of 4,860 families. Karkh RAC Director confirmed the drop in returns, but was not concerned, as he believes that displaced families are waiting for the end of the school year in June before returning home. Sadek said the RAC has been busy, so far, in June and expects returns to increase during the following months. OFDA implementing partners at the RAC reported 853 new return cases at the center during the first half of the month and suggested that June may be the busiest month since the RAC opened its doors in November 2008.

¶4. (C) Sadek informed REF and OFDA of a recent MODM program permitting unregistered displaced families to register as returnees. From April 16 to June 16, MODM allowed displaced families who wished to return to their original residencies, but had never registered with the MODM, to register as returnees and qualify for Government of Iraq (GOI) stipends. According to Karkh RAC data, the center registered 1,450 such families during this two month period. Sadek did not explain why MODM stopped these registrations after two months. He commented that many families may have been interested but were not aware of the opportunity.

¶5. (C) MODM DG for Humanitarian Affairs, Samir al Nahi, said the Prime Minister's Office had promised to provide MODM with an additional \$120.5 million for humanitarian assistance. Samir said that \$26.5 million were unspent MODM funds from 2007 and \$94 million was new money. Samir rattled off a list of initiatives the supplemental funding would cover, including food baskets⁸ and non-food items (NFI) to vulnerable returnees and IDPs. A completely new initiative is MODM's plan to conduct a general survey of IDPs to assess their needs and intent to return) the DG added that this survey would help determine how to facilitate returns to Abu Ghraib (REF). MODM is also considering offering a 500,000 Iraqi Dinar (\$400) stipend to those IDPs who have decided not to move back to their original neighborhood, but have integrated elsewhere and no longer consider themselves displaced.

¶6. (C) Comment: Based on 2008 trends and June returns, it is reasonable to expect a spike in returns during the months of July through September. Of course, security remains the

BAGHDAD 00001607 002 OF 002

primary consideration for returnees and the withdrawal of U.S. forces for Iraq's cities by June 30 could impact returns. The promise of additional funding for MODM's humanitarian assistance appears to have reinvigorated the Ministry's efforts to facilitate returns, but it remains to be seen if the funds will be allocated. Comments from the MODM predicting the resolution of Iraq's displacement crisis by the end of the year, paired with the narrow window of opportunity for unregistered IDP families to register as returnees and the deafening silence about Iraqi refugees, leaves the impression that the Ministry remains anxious to close the files⁸ on displacement. In its discussions with the Government of Iraq the U.S. government and its implementing partners should continue to recommend a multi-faceted, sustainable approach to facilitating returns. The U.S. government should also press the GOI to refrain from declaring the displacement crisis resolved by the end of the year when such a large portion of Iraq's displaced families are unwilling to return due to unpredictable security conditions and lack of services. End comment.

FORD